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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether reading ability is a significant factor in the level of student writing apprehension and whether writing apprehension is reduced as reading skills improve. Subjects were 49 college freshmen enrolled in a reading improvement course that was directed toward learning in three domains: (1) cognitive--knowledge, synthesis, and application of reading skills; (2) psychomotor--actual reading; and (3) affective--reading as an enjoyable, nonthreatening experience. Instruments used in the study were the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, which was administered both at the beginning and at the end of the course, and the writing Apprehension Test, which was administered during freshmen orientation experiences before enrollment. Results indicated that reading ability contributed to low apprehension and lack of reading ability to high writing apprehension, which, in turn, kept anxious writers from effective reading. The findings suggest that improvement in one area will lead to improvement in the other, and that any experience with language that brings a student to a more intimate, comfortable station with words will transfer skill to the entire spectrum of language. (A copy of the Writing Apprehension Test is appended.) (FL)

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WHAT HAPPENS TO WRITING APPREHENSION IN A READING CLASS?

A paper presented at the annual meeting of

SOUTH CENTRAL MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION SPECIAL SESSION:
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CS 007 534

What Happens to Writing Apprehension in a Reading Class?

ABSTRACT

Students who read well often write well; students who write poorly also read poorly and avoid both practices whenever possible. This avoidance tends to compound the student's lack of skills as reading/writing problems become more acute and punitive. Apprehension is often the result.

This paper seeks to identify the apprehensive state that lies within the transition of reading to writing and note changes in apprehension resulting from an improvement in reading. Described in the literature as "writing apprehension", the level drops significantly when students improve reading skills.

What Happens to Writing Apprehension in a Reading Class?

The relationship of reading to writing is a chicken -vs- egg analysis for many persons involved in the teaching of basic reading or basic writing. Teachers sense that one contributes to the other, reinforces the other, and certainly can diminish the other. The questions that have fascinated researchers include the persistent, "Which comes first?" as well as "What is the degree to which one contributes to the other?"

It comes as no surprise to experienced teachers that students who read well often write well, and that students who write poorly also read poorly and avoid both practices whenever possible. This avoidance, which denies students practice, experience, and feedback tends to compound the student's lack of skills geometrically as he/she continues an academic career. The more advanced a student progresses in academic grade or level, the more acute and punitive reading/writing problems become. Often sooner than later, students develop an apprehensive state about both activities and eventually confound any efforts to remediate.

This paper seeks to identify this apprehensive state that lies within the transition of reading to writing, based on the premise that reading activities come first, those including listening, being read to, modeling stories from nursery rhymes, fairy tales, family characters, television

stimulation and the like. The symbolization of reading--words, sentences, paragraphs, are but a more advanced code medium for the same activities: listening (to oneself), reading (to oneself) and modeling stories based on readings. If reading skills are sufficient to allow the delight of the complex experience to emerge, writing skills are developed with the same curiosity, discovery, excitement, and accomplishment. Sadly, the opposite is also true: that students who experience failure, frustration, fear in reading often transfer these same affective learnings to the writing process.

Writing hesitancy is often a result, not because students cannot write, and not always because they will not write, but because they are afraid to write. They develop what Daly and Miller have dubbed "writing apprehension." Daly reports that students high in apprehension are unwilling to voluntarily take course work where extensive writing is required (Daly and Miller, 1975b). They report unsuccessful past experiences in writing, encode significantly less intense messages than do those with low apprehension (Daly and Miller, 1975c), and show a preference for occupations with low writing requirements (Daly and Shamo, 1976). High writing apprehensive students write less per assignment (Daly, 1977) and perform less well on skills tests than do low writing apprehensive students (Daly, 1978).

Garcia (1977) reports that low apprehensive students demonstrate syntactic characteristics of mature writers more consistently than do high apprehensive students and that the quality of writing performance is partially dependent on the level of writing apprehension.

Students low in apprehension write three times as many words as those high in apprehension, write twice as many paragraphs, and produce essays one and one half times as long. The high apprehensive students measure two and one half times as many spelling errors. They use more words to say less. Further, "writing apprehensive persons have less confidence in their opinions and judgments and are likely to reduce the risk of exposure by revealing less about their views" (Book, 1977).

From these descriptions of writing apprehension in the literature, it is evident that apprehension can create a barrier between student and clean, clear writing. In dealing with this barrier, researchers have suggested free writing, journal writing, peer evaluation and other such non-traditional approaches to writing. The questions posed from this paper would acknowledge the possible role that reading plays in the reduction of writing apprehension:

1). Does reading contribute a significant factor in the level of writing apprehension?

2). Can writing apprehension be reduced as reading skills are increased?

METHOD The 49 students who voluntarily provided data leading to the answers of questions noted above were students enrolled in reading improvement courses during the spring semester in 1982. The course was required for those entering freshmen whose ACT composite scores were less than 14.

The instruments used in the study were the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly and Miller, 1975a) and the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, which was administered during freshmen orientation experiences before enrollment. The Writing Apprehension Test was administered both pre and post treatment, which was the reading improvement course itself.

TREATMENT The reading improvement course was directed toward learnirg in three domains: cognitive, the knowledge, synthesis, and application of reading skills; psychomotor, many class periodsdevoted to at least 90% actual reading; and affective, reading as an enjoyable, nonthreatening experience. Students had assignments in two textbooks and on a reading accelerator. Writing was not a part of the course curriculum, nor was it mentioned or taught during the semester. Whatever changes in writing apprehension that were evident at the end of the period were derived only from reading, and not from writing instruction or experience.

DATA ANALYSIS Initial correlations were sought between pretreatment writing apprehension and the various scores available from the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. The score for rate, or words-per-minute, was found to have no relationship to writing apprehension. The scores for vocabulary, comprehension, and their combination-total reading-were found to correlate significantly with pretreatment writing apprehension at -.39, probability of chance at less than 1%. (See Figure 1.)

That correlation indicated a strong relationship between poor reading skills, as demonstrated by the subject group, and high writing apprehension. The inverse, high reading skills and low writing apprehension, would, then, also be significantly related.

Other statistical operations were conducted to identify the degree to which reading plays a part in the level of writing apprehension. To satisfy the terms of this implied question, regression analysis was completed on the pretreatment data using the Nelson-Denny total reading score as an independent variable to the dependent variable of writing apprehension. Results of that analysis indicated that the level of reading skills evident in the ND total reading score accounts for 15% of the variance in writing apprehension, a low but still significant amount ($P \geq .006$). (See Figure 2.)

Those statistical tests proving significant relationships, it was appropriate to measure the writing apprehension

at the end of the course to note changes, if any, that had occurred as a result of gains in reading abilities, attitudes, and experiences. The level of apprehension for each student at posttreatment was compared to the level of apprehension at pretreatment. A significant reduction in writing apprehension was observed, the mean score dropping five points. Probability for this drop's being a chance occurrence was less than 1%. (See Figure 3.)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS It is evident from the relationships identified between reading and writing apprehension in this study that reading ability contributes to lower apprehension and that lack of reading ability contributes to higher apprehension, which, in turn, keeps anxious writers from effective writing. The theory implied from the changes in writing apprehension after reading improvement suggest that an improvement in one will enhance the other, that any experience in language that brings a student to a more intimate, comfortable station with words will transfer skill to the entire spectrum of language.

If a student understands thesis sentence in writing, he/she will be more likely to find main idea in reading. If he/she can use persuasion, then directional arguments are easier to identify and analyze in reading. Similarly,

if a student is familiar with vocabulary and comprehension concepts from reading, with description and development from reading, and with mood and tone from reading, these elements of good writing are at his/her disposal, not at some unapproachable distance. It logically follows that pleasure in writing can be derived from pleasure in reading; writing apprehension is reduced as reading skills amass.

This introductory study suggests several continuing research needs:

1). How is the writing process changed as reading improves?

2). How much do reading skills improve if a gain in writing skills is evident?

3). Can the reduction in writing apprehension, itself an affective learning, be attributed to cognitive reading gain, or affective changes in reading attitude?

4). Is there such a factor as "reading apprehension"? If so, does it affect reading in the same ways that writing apprehension affects writing?

5). Are change in reading or writing skills actually due to change in apprehension toward both skills?

C O R R E L A T I O N

Variable X: Pretreatment Writing Apprehension	Variable Y: Nelson-Denny Total Reading
Mean of X: 78.7708	Mean of Y: 54.9583
S.D. of X: 19.5024	S.D. of Y: 17.7213

Number of Pairs (N) = 49

Correlation Coefficient (r)= -.389*

Degrees of Freedom (DF) = 47

Probability = .01

Figure 1: Correlation of Pretreatment Writing Apprehension with Nelson-Denny Total Reading Scores.

R E G R E S S I O N

Coefficient of Determination (R Sq)	=	.152
Coefficient of Multiple Correlation	=	.389
Standard Error of Estimate	=	16.673
Residual Sum of Squares	=	12788.9
Regression Sum of Squares	=	2289.88
Total Sum of Squares	=	15078.8
F-Ratio (Regression)	=	8.236
Degrees of Freedom	=	1 & 47
Probability of Chance	=	0.006
Number of Cases (Subjects)	=	49
Number of Independent Variables	=	1

Figure 2: Regression Analysis with Reading Total Scores as an Independent Variable of Dependent Variable Writing Apprehension.

T - T E S T R E S U L T S

Variable X: Pretreatment Writing Apprehension		Variable Y: Posttreatment Writing Apprehension	
Mean of X:	78.7708	Mean of Y:	73.551
S.D. of X:	19.5024	S.D. of Y:	18.1321
S.E. Mean:	2.7947	S.E. Mean:	2.6171

Number of Pairs (N)	= 49
Degrees of Freedom (DF)	= 48
T-Ratio for Difference	= 2.959*
Probability	= 0.002

Figure 3: T-Test Analysis of Difference in Mean from Pretreatment Writing Apprehension to Posttreatment Writing Apprehension.

Figure 4: Writing Apprehension Test

Directions: Below are a series of statements about writing. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Please indicate your response to the following statements by recording the appropriate number in the space provided. While some of these statements may seem repetitious, take your time and try to be as honest as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

Scale: (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain
(4) agree (5) strongly agree

_____ 1. I avoid writing.
_____ 2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.
_____ 3. I look forward to writing down my ideas.
_____ 4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.
_____ 5. Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience.
_____ 6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good.
_____ 7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition.
_____ 8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.
_____ 9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication.
_____ 10. I like to write my ideas down.
_____ 11. I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing.
_____ 12. I like to have my friends read what I have written.
_____ 13. I'm nervous about writing.
_____ 14. People seem to enjoy what I write.
_____ 15. I enjoy writing.
_____ 16. I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.
_____ 17. Writing is a lot of fun.
_____ 18. I expect to do poorly in composition courses even before I enter them.
_____ 19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper.
_____ 20. Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.
_____ 21. I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course.
_____ 22. When I hand in a composition, I know I'm going to do poorly.
_____ 23. It's easy for me to write good compositions.
_____ 24. I don't think I write as well as most other people.
_____ 25. I don't like my compositions to be evaluated.
_____ 26. I'm no good at writing. (Daly and Miller, 1975a)

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